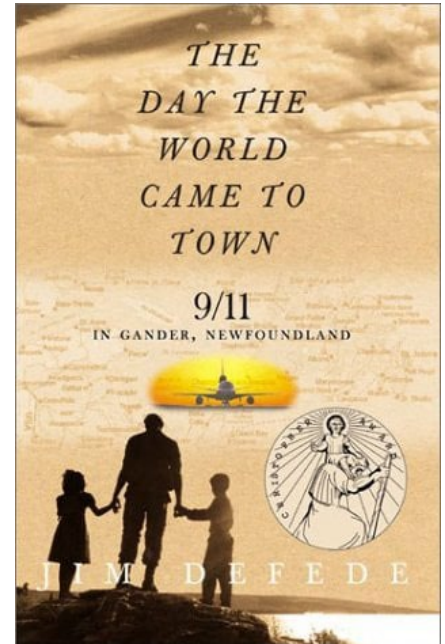


# The Day the World Came to Town

By Jim DeFede

We all remember the shock and agony of 9/11. The horrific pictures we saw on TV were like a nightmare we all wanted to be over, something to wake up from. The heroic first responders showed the true, honorable character of our society. There is one story, however, that made a small bit of news and then was seemingly forgotten, the story of the people of Gander, Newfoundland, and the surrounding hamlets. The airport there has long been known as a haven for fuel-starved aircraft coming from Europe. During WWII, it was a bustling military base. The long runways remain, but the airport is vital now only because of its strategic location, not its size or activity.



When thirty-eight jetliners bound for the United States were suddenly told that U.S. airspace was closed and they must land at the nearest location, Gander again became a haven, this time for weary travelers and confused flight crews who had not been told the details of the national emergency. The one word from an air traffic controller that can cost a pilot his license if disobeyed is “instructed.” First, the flights were asked to land, and a few were “instructed.” They landed.

If ever there was a modern-day version of Matthew 25, this is it. A major part of this story is the manner in which the town of Gander opened its doors to thousands of passengers and flight crews of these thirty-eight flights.

It is a story of the human spirit at its best.

Peace,  
Mike Slayter